

Adventure Central: Partners in Positive Youth Development

Nate Arnett, Angela Collie, and Crystal Sheppard – Adventure Central



Overview

Adventure Central is a trusted, community-based, positive youth development partnership serving at-risk children and their parents in the West Dayton community for over 17 years. This nationally recognized program has been at the forefront of positive youth development—providing children and families opportunities to change their lives through building positive well-being, higher academic performance, and less involvement in risky behaviors. Using nature, our high quality and diverse staff nurtures participants in life-changing activities that strengthen values, build lasting life skills, and empower youth to explore life's possibilities.

At Adventure Central, we are unified by our belief that encouraging new experiences, especially in nature, can build life skills and confidence which make children happier, healthier and more productive members of their community. Adventure Central is uniquely qualified to turn these beliefs into action and results through the passion, expertise and resources of its core partners: Five Rivers MetroParks, Ohio State University Extension and 4-H.

Youth are engaged throughout the year in a variety of delivery methods to include after-school, day camp, and residential camping experiences all emphasizing sustained long term relationships. Special programmatic emphasis is also placed on supporting and developing teens through high quality work, service learning and leadership experiences.



By The Numbers

- 2 National 4-H Programs of Distinction
 - After School Program (2011)
 - Job Experience and Training Program (2009)
- 1 of 16 programs identified nationally as a Promising Practice in Urban 4-H Science (2011) More information at: <http://urban4hscience.rutgers.edu/>
- 70,000 contact hours annually
- 230 youth served annually
- Daily attendance: 95 (after school), 115 (day camp) M-Th
- Over 120 volunteers/supports annually contributing 13,000 hours of service
- 90% of parents strongly agree that Adventure Central is safe place for their child/ren and the staff are caring and encourage their child/ren

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
&
FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS



"PARTNERS IN POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT"

Current Initiatives

Reforestation (2014-Present)

Older youth at Adventure Central have "Gone Nuts!" for the last three years and in the process have collected hundreds of gallons of native nuts and seeds, started over 4,000 seedlings (in our basement with confiscated grow lights from local law enforcement), and planted nearly 2,000 of these trees and shrubs in our very own Wesleyan MetroPark. This effort is part of a larger reforestation initiative within Five Rivers MetroParks to proactively combat the threat of invasive species to our forests. This project won the 2016 national NAE4HA Excellence in Natural Resources and Environmental Education award.



Summer and After School Collaborative (2015-Present)

Adventure Central is one of 10 programs at 16 sites in Dayton and Trotwood who are working together with funders and key institutions to improve program quality at our out-of-school time programs. This effort has been led by Learn to Earn Dayton, the area Cradle to Career organization, along with the City of Learners Initiative out of the Dayton Mayor's office.

Focus areas include:

- Student attendance
- Academic behavior and growth
- Family engagement
- Social emotional learning
- Healthy lifestyles

Using common evaluation tools, early data on 944 children indicates youth and program staff are seeing positive engagement in learning and connections with program staff, two bedrocks for program quality. Pre/post evaluations are being conducted and data will be tracked year over year by programs to demonstrate quality and determine areas for growth and improvement.

Capital Campaign and Endowment (2016-Present)

Adventure Central is growing up, and with this maturity so comes the need to do some upgrades and invest for future sustainability. Adventure Central has two active fundraising efforts through each of its major partners.

OSU Foundation – An endowment to support the program and operations of Adventure Central is currently underway. The ultimate goal is \$2.5 million.

Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation – A kitchen redevelopment capital campaign is actively seeking supporters. This project will right size the kitchen operation, replace aging equipment, and improve sustainability efforts in a number of ways. The goal is \$500,000 for this project.

Impact

Youth Leadership Exploration and Development (YLEAD) Study (2018)

Anderson-Butcher, Bates, Ferrari, and Volek

A growing interest in how adolescents can prepare for the workforce and give back to their communities has contributed to the development of positive youth development (PYD) programs focused on youth leadership. This study used a qualitative approach to explore what mechanisms and components support leadership development among youth participating in three different PYD programs in Ohio, including the Adventure Central Job Experience and Training work-based learning program.

Common themes across the three programs included the reasons youth became involved, skills developed as a result of their participation, and relationships built with peers and program staff. Notably, encouragement from an adult or peer, support from program staff and/or parents, and a desire to follow in the footsteps of older youth led to involvement in the programs. Youth participants reported they learned skills that they would use outside of the program and that would also continue to benefit them in the future. Specifically, skills included communication, public speaking, and interpersonal skills; teamwork; and problem-solving.

Participants in all three focus groups referenced the positive relationships gleaned from experiences and participation in activities with fellow program participants. In two of the groups where the youth had longer involvement with the same peer groups, youth referred to themselves as "family." Evidently, long-term involvement created a culture where youth felt their peers and program staff functioned as a major social support system in their lives.



Program Quality (2011)

Source: Ohio State University Master's Thesis, Ashley Krogel

Considerable attention has been directed to identifying features of high quality out-of-school time programs. Observation instruments are a common way of measuring program quality at the point of service.

Through this assessment pilot, both observers and youth gave high ratings (i.e., mean scores > 3.0 on a 4-point scale) to supportive adult relationships. Observers also gave high ratings to group management and delivery.

Program quality observations have become a regular part of program assessment and improvement, with each group leader being observed 2-3 times per semester, with improvements noted over time.